

PhD course:

Gender, Sexuality and Vulnerability in Theory and Methodology

Thursday 19 & Friday 20 November 2026 in Bergen, Norway

The Norwegian Research School in Gender Studies is pleased to invite doctoral candidates to attend this PhD course to reflect on various conceptualisations of vulnerability in feminist, queer, gender and sexuality research, both theoretically and methodologically. Participants are encouraged to consider the pertinence of vulnerability in (parts of) their research projects, how it relates to other key categories, and how it is relevant to their research areas more broadly.

Organisers/contact persons:

Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen, professor of gender studies, University of Stavanger,
elisabeth.l.engebretsen@uis.no

Randi Gressgård, professor of gender studies, University of Bergen, randi.gressgard@uib.no

Course Overview:

Over the past few decades, vulnerability has attracted considerable attention, fuelling discussions in feminist and queer theory, gender studies and related disciplines. While 'vulnerability' has a longer conceptual history within feminist normative theory and ethics, its more recent surge in popularity stems in no small part from Judith Butler's influential work. Butler's understanding of vulnerability as deeply embodied and relational has been immensely generative but has also provoked significant debate, particularly concerning the somewhat ambiguous onto-political status of 'precariousness'.

By extension, some scholars have engaged in efforts to rethink the relation between vulnerability and sovereignty, challenging the masculinist fantasy of invulnerability prevalent in traditional conceptions of sovereignty. While one segment of this discourse aims to construct alternative understandings sovereignty by centring vulnerability, another segment emphasises the dissolution of representational distinctions between an inner and outer world, including notions of sovereign exteriority (in terms of emergency or exception). If the former position attempts to reconceptualise sovereignty from the view of vulnerability,

the latter pursues a vulnerability that questions the core tenets of sovereign power in all its variations.

The latter intervention is often associated with post-humanist, new materialist or indigenous perspectives which assign agency to non-human relations, thereby also expanding vulnerability beyond human affairs. In the context of the Anthropocene, vulnerability has also resurfaced as key concept in governance, particularly in climate, environment, disaster and security policies oriented towards resilience, which challenge conventional ideas of sustainability, security and protection.

In contemporary policy frameworks and research methodologies, vulnerability is conceptualised less as an impediment to be overcome and more as an inherent aspect of life. This emergent field of enquiry posits vulnerability as a condition of collaborative creation and mutual learning, cultivating heightened awareness and responsiveness within an interconnected world. The analytical focus is redirected from discrete individuals to their practices and their embeddedness in complex human and non-human environments.

As the term vulnerability has dispersed through contemporary scholarly and policy discourses, its significations have gradually shifted from a primarily negative to a more affirmative approach, even as conventional understandings of vulnerability continue to inform both scholarly and political discourses – often in contradictory ways.

Eligibility, Credits and Important Dates:

Applicants must be registered PhD candidates whose research involves gender, feminist and sexuality methodology or theory, with priority given to those from Norwegian gender studies programmes. The maximum number of participants is twenty (20).

Full in-person participation with presentation awards 3 ECTS, whereas full participation, presentation and submission of paper (engaging with course literature) by Friday 19 December grants 5 ECTS.

Application deadline: Monday 31 August 2026.

Decisions will be communicated by 20 September 2026.

Application Process:

Please submit your application via this online form: <https://nettskjema.no/a/633043>

Draft programme:

Venue: Bergen Global <https://maps.app.goo.gl/Wb6PrdvdvavHBQLS7>

Thursday 19 November 2026

12:00–13:00 Lunch

13:00–13:30 Welcome

13:30–14:30 Keynote by Kata Kyrölä (University College London): *Paradoxes of vulnerability in the age of 'cancel culture': Rage, desire, and 'bad objects' of feminist, queer and trans activism and academia*

14:30 – 15:00 Coffee break

15:00–17:00 Project workshops

17:00–17:15 Break

17:15–18:00 Online keynote by Dianne A. Williams (Columbia University): *Nested extraction and the sovereignty–vulnerability nexus in postcolonial justice*

19:30 Dinner

Friday 20 November 2026

09:15–10:45 Project workshops

10:45–11:00 Coffee break

11:00–12:00 Keynote by Sara Edenheim (Umeå University): *Butler before vulnerability: traces of other relations to kin and gender in the early writings of Butler*

12:00–13:00 Lunch

13:30–15:00 Project workshops

Please note that meals are included, but travel costs and accommodation are not covered.